

ABSTRACT

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Geminuspace, is a meditation on the vanishing of a linear perception of time, a flirtation with future memory, past infinity, and infinite present. The inhabitants of this suspended reality, this trancescape, waltz their achromatic encounters of self and fellow selves in the grand ballroom of sound and image. We ponder the idea of a geminate reality, the duplicate, a twin existence, through the wide lens of imagination.

The ideas that form the backbone and brain of the work are drawn from the imagined realms of the virtual. The work playfully examines the possibility of the existence of the human body, lifted out of its three-dimensional life and breath, in an alien world of the two-dimensional.

GEMINUSPACE

by

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Introduction

We are living in a world that is dangerously technologically dependent and infatuated. The populations of the most developed and, consequently, “model” countries spend many hours each day “plugged in.” It is rapidly becoming unacceptable to be “one of those people” that opts out of this lifestyle. You are expected to be able to be in constant communication, to be able to be reached by anyone, at any hour, at all times. When we are not actively engaged in communication with another in real time, we sit and type in our blogs and twitter feeds. We spend much of our time texting, emailing, cyber-chatting, and/or with a cellular phone pressed up to our ear or strapped to our head. We are completely in touch and not touching at all. More and more of our schools are teaching the future generations by having them sit in front of flickering monitors for long hours and learning via online courses, a “handsfree” teaching method and, consequently, a completely impersonal one. We are already deep in the process of testing and continuing to develop truly functional brain-computer interface technology, the human brain controlling a computer by thought and a computer sending “thoughts” back to the human brain. Bionic bodies are no longer a thing of myth and legend. These technologies will not only be used as they have in the past and are being

used currently, as replacements for injured or missing limbs/organs, but as enhancements, as upgrades for the parts we are born with. I once asked my brother if he was nervous about getting old, and he replied, “By the time my body wears out, I’m thinking I’ll probably be able to be uploaded into a virtual world.” The “I,” then, is perhaps becoming less attached to the physical self. The less time we spend with our bodies, actively present in our bodies, the less it may seem that they are more than just a vessel for our “self.” I am a physical being. I am a mover. I am more terrified by the thought of continuing to exist after the expiration of my body, than by the thought of simply ceasing to exist. I do not want to be uploaded, upgraded, programmed, and reprogrammed. I do not want to be cyberized. I want to be human.

I am not anti-technology. In fact, I am one who is “plugged in.” However, it does not stop me from wondering where and to what extremes technology will take our human race. I wanted to do this project as a kind of meditation on the continuing existence of the physical in the face of the increasingly virtual. The kind of science fiction (at this point anyway) inspired question of, “If I were to be “uploaded,” as my brother suggests he will be, what would that look like for me? What does it mean to permanently exist in a virtual space? What is ‘virtual permanence?’ What does the passing of virtual time feel like? Is there even time, a feeling of past, present, and future? How do the human senses and sensations translate into the virtual? Do ‘I’ no longer even need to/get to breathe?

Who is in charge if 'I' am simply part of some expansive database? What if 'I' get deleted? Am 'I' alone or will 'I' see others? Am 'I' suddenly endowed with virtual immortality, and simply forced to exist forever? Who and what do 'I' become?"

These are questions about the nature and definition of "self." What or who is this "self," and what must be present for the recognition and existence of self. The self I recognize is the product of the experience, the memory, the touch, the sound, the breath, the dreams, the time of the physical world in which it exists. The thought of the translation of this physical self into a virtual world is perhaps my idea of the end of the world, the apocalypse. The apocalypse is the idea of the world being "out of time." I imagine this virtual existence as being a timeless, touchless, breathless, dreamless one. There is no laundry list, the bomb shelters and guns and bottled water mentality, of the commonly accepted notion of the end of the world. There is no way to prepare, to "get ready" for one's "self" to enter into such an existence. *Geminuspace* is my own investigation of these equally fascinating and horrific ideas and worries and hopes.

Statement of Project

Geminuspace is a meditation on the vanishing of a linear perception of time, a flirtation with future memory, past infinity, and infinite present. The inhabitants of this suspended reality, this trance-scape, waltz their

achromatic encounters of self and fellow selves in the grand ballroom of sound and image. We ponder the idea of a geminate reality, the duplicate, a twin existence, through the wide lens of imagination.

Inspiration and References

I drew my inspiration for *Geminuspace* from quite a wide variety of material and experience, and mostly from material that I “naturally” encountered (material that I did not seek out for the purpose of making the piece), as well as from familiar material that I was compelled to revisit and reconsider.

Video and the Virtual

The time that I spent in the department’s video lab had quite a profound impact on me. I, of course, came into the program with a great interest in video dance, but I had never spent so many consecutive hours, on a regular basis, watching, editing, duplicating and digitizing videoed dance. In addition to the lab work, I found myself spending a substantial amount of time filming department technique and choreography classes, as well as performances. I am not certain, but it is possible that I was actually spending more time watching video recorded dance than live dance. I was becoming quite familiar with this two-dimensional, shrunken, abnormally colored, glitch-prone kind of dance. The idea of dance, this inherently three dimensional, vital, ultra-human, and “in the moment” form, being

compressed (in this case digitally) into strings of 1's and 0's, read by a laser, decompressed, and then reconstructed via pixels onto a monitor or television, where it can be watched and re-watched, never changing, seems mildly insane and gloriously fascinating. And somewhere along the way, during this process of collapsing the three-dimensional into the two-dimensional, the life, the vitality that was present in the original image would get lost. The original breathing, sensing, thinking being had now become just a series of rectangles or dots or lines. This two dimensional representation of what was once three-dimensional delivered a skewed take on object permanence. If the image of the person on the television screen or computer monitor turns their back to the "audience," their face and the front side of their body, for that amount of time, is not only not visible but actually no longer exists. Contrary to our everyday three-dimensional logic, which accommodates an infinite number of perspectives, no sides actually physically disappearing when not being observed, the two-dimensional really only accommodates a single perspective, it having only its one side. There is literally no space, no dimension, for more than one visible side to exist within. This means that a human being that has been captured on film can ever only be a one-sided representation of his/her original multi-sided self in any given frame. Though frame rates vary, I am used to working with thirty frames per second, meaning 30 still pictures flash before your eyes in a single second. Because each frame, the frames arranged in sequential order, is very

slightly different from the frame immediately preceding and following it, it appears that the image displayed is continuously moving. So, using only single frames, if I want to simultaneously represent more than one side of a single individual or perhaps bring a second image into the mix, I would need at least two different sequences of frames to simultaneously occupy two different regions of the same screen. With the new easy to use video editing software, there are a number of ways this can be accomplished, but with some limitations. If you choose not to use any of the canned video editing software's overlapping or cross-fade effects to have multiple series of frames simultaneously appear on the display, you can separate the individual frames and reassemble them, each frame now next to a frame from a different series but still in the correct sequential order, in a repeating pattern. In the final portion of my video dance *Eidolon*, which was a related but un-included study, I experimented with this concept. I sliced three separate strings of footage, the footage being of myself, into single frames. I then arranged the single frames in a repeating pattern, a A1, B1, C1, A2, B2, C2, etc. So, when the pattern was played it was like a high-speed flipbook, but one where two or three images of myself appeared to exist in a single space, the images were able to encounter one another and/or overlap. So, what if, with a little stretch of the imagination and in thinking about the virtual world idea, these images of self could actually cross paths? What if my copies and I found our "selves" in a shared space? Are they really individuals? Are they able to see each other

in the two-dimensional space, or are they only able to feel the presence of an “other.” If we see each frame as an individual, how does that 1/30 of a second removal from their twin change them, make them unique? Would they attempt to order themselves in an effort to make sequential sense with one another?

So, with my imagination always ready to run wild, it is obviously easy for me to begin to humanize these images. I am imagining that these images have somehow retained some shred of the self-awareness of their three-dimensional source. If we assume that they at least, on some primal level, know they exist, how would they cope, if they even cared to cope, with their unknown origins, their lack of context, and, because of their missing dimension, the nothingness that exists on all sides of them? Are they privileged to any of the thoughts and memories of the original? If so, what does one existing in a two-dimensional world, where perhaps there is no tense but the present, make of a memory? Furthermore, these captive video folk are at the mercy of the editor. They can be sliced, diced, cloned, reversed, shuffled, deleted etc. without notification or discussion. Taking it a step further in the realm of the completely imaginary, what would happen if I were able to pull them out of their virtual existence and back into three-dimensional reality? Though impossible, it's not unimaginable. What are they like? How do they move? How do they respond to the sudden addition of context? How do they adapt to a third dimension? These purely imaginary musings, paired with the more observable

qualities of human bodies, as translated by video, were the inspiration for the movement language developed for the piece. To give specific examples, the idea of the video body having to constantly display slightly different sides of itself in a sequence of movements was translated fairly literally onto the dancers. I choreographed strings of intricate sequential anglings of the dancers' bodies, which they had to perform, at times, as rapidly as possible and, at other times, as undetectably slowly as possible. Another example of my use of these motion picture ideas as inspiration for the movement language makes reference to the earlier mentioned idea of a series of almost same still images (which would have appeared in a side by side fashion on a traditional strip of celluloid film) being able to create a single continuously moving image. This became translated into the episodes of conjoined movement in the piece.

The Undeniable References to the Ballet as Form and Commentary

To anyone that is somewhat familiar with dance, it is quite obvious that there are references to ballet happening in *Geminuspace*. Even audience members (and I am making an assumption here) that are not particularly familiar with ballet see the tutus and are probably able make some kind of link. On another level, one might see a connection to ballet

in terms of the alternative realms of existence that many ballets and, so I believe, *Geminuspace* have in common. If ballet can make a fleet of dead virgins, swans that transform into humans, and nutcrackers that come alive to fight giant rats digestible and, to some degree, believable, then perhaps ballet is somehow a master of the old “suspension of disbelief.” This is quite useful when working with topics of a mostly imaginary and supernatural nature.

Secondly, classical ballet, like a military, employs the concept of shared group identity. Though a group is made up of individuals, the individuals within this kind of group identify not as individuals but as a single entity. They share a language, a voice, a vision, and, often, a physical appearance. Because I was interested in examining the idea of clones, twins, and/or multiple selves, it seemed sensible and most effective to present these ideas in a context that made these anything but familiar concepts seem vaguely familiar. To put this more simply, I did not want to completely alienate the audience by only presenting the “alien.” Instead, I wanted to expose the alien inside of the familiar.

Lastly, ballet invites and generates a very particular kind of judgment amongst its audiences and performers. The form promotes a strange, semi-psychotic obsession with the act of comparing. Ballet seeking audiences will see the same ballet over and over again, not for the story, but for the chance to compare the present performance to past performances. A balletomane already knows the steps and has a fairly

concrete scale with which to judge the quality of the steps' execution. They will sit and count the fouettés and they will take note of the height of a leg in arabesque, all in an effort to determine if so and so's leg was higher and who's-it's turns were more precise in last year's *Swan Lake*. The audience comes with an archetype of Giselle or Paquita or Solor and the performer must meet or surpass those expectations in order to be successful in his/her role of Giselle or Paquita or Solor. All of the Giselles and Paquitas, who have come, gone, and presently exist in a parallel state, and perhaps we should even include the versions to come, have a present bearing on the success or failure of the current dancer/s. We can transpose this idea onto "self" and all of the versions of self, the selves that exist in memory and in present and in future. We, perhaps some of us more prone to this kind of reflection and projection than others, find ourselves constantly holding the present version of self up to the archetypical "self" that has been both individually and socially constructed. Without the memory of past selves and some notion of a future self, we have no context for a present self. And, though we need both a past and future to recognize and make sense of the present, the continuous process of the cross-comparison of past, present and future self, prevents, in a way, the possibility of fully present self. We, visually speaking, need the "ahead" and the "behind" in order to establish the "here." Circling back to earlier discussion of the two-dimensional, the two-dimensional lacks this sense of the ahead and the behind, nothing exists in front or behind it. So, in other

words, it seems that we humans instinctually look for clues that establish a history and future for an image or object, a logical reason for it being in the here and now. We have some hardwired need to constantly construct narratives, narratives which explain and bring meaning to current situations, narratives that create the space for people, places and things to logically exist. What if we lose and are unable to reclaim our place in our own constructed sense of time? What if we stray so far from the reality that our sensing bodies were developed to exist in, that we are unable to sense the things, the experiences and hopes and moments that make us make sense.

On a much less hypothetical note, but still pondering human existence in the two-dimensional and still in reference to ballet, let us talk briefly about the conventional stage space. This conventional stage space is already equipped with the familiar rectangular frame that we are already accustomed to seeing all things two-dimensional through. It is ripe for and often succeeds in flattening the three-dimensionality of human bodies. I wanted to exaggerate rather than mask this effect. This kind of play with dimension in dance works has been done before, perhaps most famously in Vaslav Nijinsky's *L'après-midi d'un faune*. Though I do not feel that I actively or intentionally commented on or utilized movement directly inspired by this work, I will have to count it as an influence. It was one of the first dance works that popped into my mind as I began thinking about

this idea of humans existing in a two-dimensional world, and what the translation of this idea into a three dimensional space might look like.

Also, I directly reference the *Danse des petits cygnets* from the very famous ballet *Swan Lake*. This seemed fitting, not only because I had a quartet to work with, but because of this idea of a hyper-shared sense of identity, four moving exactly as one. They are seen as clones, having only an interdependent sense of identity. They cannot function without reference to and the context of one another. Though the choreography was not at all close to the movement found in *Danse des petits cygnets*, I did have them start in “dancer’s rest” or “B-plus” to suggest a direct and intentional connection.

Choreographic process

Something that Tere O’Connor, during his visit to the University of Maryland, said about the choreographic process has really stuck with me. To paraphrase, he said that the choreographic process was like coming upon the fragments of something that had been completely blown apart, and, with no idea what the thing had been before, beginning to reassemble it. This is such an excellent metaphor for the choreographic process, and one that I feel I totally relate to and appreciate. The process of developing the movement for and the identity of *Geminuspace* was very much like this. However, rather than the fragments of *Geminuspace* feeling concrete, like the fragments of some solid or mineral object that had been blown

apart, the fragments I was encountering seemed to be more of the organic type. They were gigantic bleeding pieces that seemed to have belonged to a living, breathing, fleshy thing. These pieces seemed to be rapidly expiring, decaying. They had a small window of time in which they were still viable and able to be successfully reattached. Even if I could find what I thought was a suitable point for reattachment and was actually able to perform the reattachment, it was no good if a pulse had not been reestablished. The process felt rushed and gory, me constantly having to hurriedly rip bits back off, make new incisions, and stitch and re-stitch the flesh of it. It was inhumane and inhuman, and, the whole time, the thing I was making/trying to save howled like a tortured beast. Strangely this bloody, highly organic, Frankensteinian process produced something that was anything but organic in feeling and appearance. The product was perhaps closer to whatever the strange synthetic opposite of organic might be, looking like liquid metal and feeling like shadow.

I knew that I needed dancers that were not only physically and technically strong, but that were open-minded, adaptable, had strong presences, and that would be deeply committed to the work. During the audition process, I was looking for an ability to improvise around a theme with visible conviction and intention, to quickly pick up details of set movement, and a non-fear of vocal performance. Originally, I was looking for five dancers. I already knew that I would be working with Alex Odenwald, who had been cast in a movement study, titled *Preparing*

Blanks, that I knew would be developed and included in the concert. I originally thought the other two dancers cast in that study, Hannah Frisch and Krystel Mazzeo, would also be in the concert. Frisch, who was ideal for the piece, moved out of the state. Mazzeo, as it turned out would also be the case for many of the other dancers that I selected from the audition, was selected for Pearson and Widrig's *Unmoored* restaging, which was an impossible conflict. There was no way, with *Unmoored*'s touring and rehearsal schedule that the dancers could have been a part of both works. I do not want to give the impression that I felt I had to select from "leftovers," because the dancers that did commit to my project wound up being exceptional in every way.

Because I had been counting on casting dancers that already had a familiarity with some of the movement vocabulary and a rough draft of a large section, I had not anticipated having to spend such a substantial amount of time introducing and re-teaching this movement to a new group. It is not like the movement was of the easily translatable glissade pirouette breed either, instead it was the micro-dance, detail dependent breed of, "and while your pinky is doing this, your eyeballs will be rolling up toward the ceiling." However, because the movement so truly belonged to the identity of the piece, found through the gory and ruthless choreographic process I spoke of earlier, the mood and performance of the movement surprisingly seemed to need less performance direction than one might expect from watching it from the outside. I tried to allow the

dancers, as Emily Oleson once said about the process of processing movement, to “chew on the movement,” to let it be fully digested by and settled onto their bodies, in their own way, before coming in and adding more direction where the movement seemed less clearly or fully physicalized. I let variations from the original choreography emerge and exist as long as it shared enough of the DNA or essence of the original movement. With this kind of hyper-choreographed movement, I ran the risk of becoming the dictatorial video editor Betty, where nothing but the exact, the totally controlled and planned, is acceptable. That kind of method, for both dancer and choreographer, is not a happy or rich one. In fact, because the movement started to become so absolutely familiar, each step occurring in the same way it had occurred so many times previously, I found great pleasure in, and often decided to include, the “mistakes” that periodically happened.

So much of the satisfaction that I felt with the product that was/is *Geminuspace* was the experience of having gone on such a long and extremely deep journey with my dancers in the making of the piece. They allowed me to figure it out as we went. They attempted whatever ridiculous thing it was I offered with total investment and with no apparent judgment. At times, though, I sometimes got the impression that the dancers knew much sooner than I did which sections, generally the ones that I stubbornly continued to force-fit, would eventually be cut. This was evidenced by their relieved laughter when I would finally make such

melancholy announcements of defeat. Though I was technically “in charge” of the creation of the piece, I felt that the dancers felt as heavy a responsibility to the integrity of the piece. I feel so honored that they had such faith in the piece and in me. They worked amazingly hard, and I am so very grateful to and proud of them all.

Feedback

I was very lucky to receive such helpful feedback from faculty, throughout the development of the piece. However, the comments and questions that had the most impact came very late in the process, around the time we were having our final showings. It can be difficult to really listen to what is being said about your piece when the pressures of time are weighing on your back, but I tried my hardest to keep my ears and mind open.

Sara Pearson came to see a rehearsal in the days immediately preceding the D.C. record-breaking snowstorm, which would end up halting rehearsals for an entire week. When we finished the run, I was surprised by how little she had to say about the ideas or movement or structure of the 30+ minutes of material that I showed her, mostly just offering enthusiastic words of encouragement. While words of praise are always nice, I had hoped that she would say something that would help me figure out some of the things that I had been struggling to understand and to develop in the piece. So, it was a lovely surprise when, on day two of

being snowed out of school, I got a telephone call from Sara. She started the conversation by saying, “Well, I just thought of a few things to tell you about what I saw in the rehearsal the other night,” which turned into a delicious hour-long conversation about the piece and the choreographic process in general. We ended up talking about it all, the structure of the piece, the dancers, the music, the space, but what really stuck with me were her comments about the “apocalypse quartet.” One question she posed was, “What are you showing us in this section that you haven’t shown us in the previous sections?” She followed this question by saying that this section had felt a little redundant and a bit too long. When she had seen the rehearsal, the quartet had been the last section, the order of the piece being “singing quartet,” Emily’s solo, Z duet, and the quartet being discussed. Up until this point, I had always thought that it would close the concert. It was the longest section and included all of the dancers, and, to me, seemed somehow the most interesting.

This quartet, without fail, had always been the section that was called into question or commented on by faculty or fellow dancers that had come to watch. What was it about this section that was not quite working? Sharon Mansur had questions about how the quartet was using the space, and how I could magnify some of the movement echoing between dancers and the feeling of “dancing on/in/between planes.” Karen Bradley commented on the performance qualities, it seemed more often than in other sections, of the dancers in this section. I had had the most trouble of

any of the sections finding a resolution for this quartet. I simply kept adding more and more, hoping that it would begin to feel right. Something about this quartet just seemed off, out of place, weaker than the rest of the piece.

With so many different questions about the same section, I suddenly wondered, “What if it is the order of the sections? What if this section is simply not in the right place?” So, I changed the order of the sections. This quartet would follow the video section and Z would close *Geminuspace*. It worked. It felt right. Finally!

Patrik Widrig and Sara Pearson also gave me several ideas and suggestions for other parts of the concert. One question that they both had was concerning something that I think I had known was a problem all along, but had been failing to address. Had Meriam Rosen been here to see rehearsals of the piece, I am pretty certain she would have also asked me the same question. Why were the dancers exiting in various sections? The solution was simple, because the answer was simple. The exits were unnecessary and completely arbitrary. So, I went back and found ways to incorporate all of the dancers into all of the sections. Problem solved!

Another of Patrik’s suggestions was to include a bit of the original Judy Garland version of the song “Get Happy” at the end of the overture, as a kind of introduction to the quartet’s version. It made all of the difference. The song had much more of an affect with a fresh reference to its original version. Thank you, Patrik!

In short, I really value all of the support and feedback that I received. It is so important and makes all of the difference to have access to other sets of eyes, other perspectives, in this crazy creative process. I am so thankful to have been surrounded by so many talented and insightful artists throughout this process.

The “Projection Section”

I wanted the video piece to feel uncharacteristically three-dimensional. I wanted it to envelop the entire space of the stage. It needed to feel like a tunnel that had some kind of open flow outward and inward, like a vortex of sorts. I wanted it to give the illusion that there was some kind of spiraling pathway, a porthole, into this video-scape, a possibility that it could pull people/objects in from the outside world.

I came across the filming location my first year at the University of Maryland. I did not know what exactly I could use this beautiful and crazy looking bridge in Berwyn Heights for, but I knew that I would definitely be using it for something. A series of zigzag ramps lead up to the main bridge, which is a two hundred or so foot crossway over a portion of the D.C. Metrorail. The entire bridge is covered in a half-cylinder of chain link fence, with arching metal bars supporting the fencing. When you're on the bridge, it looks like you are walking through some pre-historic-scale metallic ribcage.

I had the dancers perform movement that traveled up and down the length of the bridge. I knew that if I could get enough footage of the dancers moving the length of the tunnel that I could edit it in a way that would communicate this open porthole idea. The only problem was that it was early December and it was freezing. With any site-specific video work, where you cannot easily come back to the location with all of the subjects, it is hard to make sure that you get all of the footage that you need, but it is particularly hard when your dancers, dressed in only a few layers of tulle and some thin shirts, are beginning to look a little blue ... even under all of the white pancake makeup! There, of course, wound up being footage that I wished I had had more of or different shots of, but that's just how "one shot" video gathering is, and I ended up being moderately satisfied with the product.

The Collaborative Process: Set, Costume, Sound

Set

I wanted the space to feel expansive or expanded, a feeling that the space extended beyond the architectural constraints of the theater. The idea of the tunnel seemed relevant, tunnels having this intriguing sense of the infinite, a continuance into and beyond the vanishing point. Obviously the depth of the stage space would never allow for this literal tunnel, but would perhaps allow for the suggestion of it. The downstage would be wide and open, progressing upstage with an incremental narrowing of the space. This, I hoped, would mildly exaggerate the distance between the extreme upstage and downstage.

My choice to use the white Marley floor was a three-part decision. As stated above, I wanted to make the space feel as expansive as possible. The black Marley seems to enclose the space, whereas the white floor seems to perform the opposite function. Secondly, I was interested in the idea of grayscale, particularly for costuming, I imagined that the surrounding white would make this idea more visible. Lastly and most importantly, I imagined the work existing on a series of floating planes, plane in the geometric sense. I felt that these planes existed slightly above, below, beside, or behind the plane that is host to our “reality.” The images resting upon these planes had been lifted from a/the “reality” close by, but suffered the inescapable warping that happens with any attempt to capture images and moments that no longer exist or have yet to exist in real-time. The world that I imagined felt holographic, like the glitchy holograms in so many of the science fiction movies of my childhood. These planes of

existence that the dancers were to belong to were fragile, shifting, and collapsible. I imagined these planes as thin membranous and pigment-less structures.

As Diedre Dawkins and I prepared for our first meeting with Collin Ranney to discuss ideas for the set, I had serious doubts that we were going to be able to agree on a scenic design that worked for both pieces and that, of course, stayed within our budget. Dawkins' piece suggested earth and water and all things natural and of this world, my proposal suggested everything but. I needed large projection surfaces that I hoped would conceal most of the offstage portion of the space, as well as act as a tether between ceiling and ground. This huge space above the dancers' heads often goes unused, unfilled. I wished to include rather than ignore this space. I knew that, with these large panels, which I had imagined as three unbroken surfaces, stretching from downstage to upstage and across the cyclorama, it would be extremely limiting for the lighting design, even if the panels were made with material that allowed some light to penetrate. However, when I first laid eyes on Ranney, dressed in cowboy boots, a peacock feather pin, a tuxedo vest, a vibrant purple silk shirt unbuttoned to the navel, and with hair that seemed to defy gravity, I had a feeling that he was the man for the job.

During that initial meeting, Ranney expressed concern about the panels for precisely the reason I had anticipated, the restriction it would place on the lighting design. He, being remarkably creative and skilled at

his profession, quickly sketched a series of broken panels that could be slanted (rotated on the diagonal) to create a more or less uninterrupted projection surface but that would still allow for sidelight to be used.

Brilliant!

Over the weeks following this meeting Ranney and I continued our dialogue. I sent him videos of rehearsals and he sent me images that he felt related. Though none of our continued ideas actually surfaced in the final product, mostly due to budget, perhaps they will surface in another version of this piece. These ideas included such things as large spheres placed in the space and an interesting chandelier or hung lighting fixture.

Up until the first production meeting, where Ranney was to present his design, I still had no idea how he planned to satisfy the needs of both of these pieces with one set. When he presented the model, I was absolutely thrilled. Moreover, I couldn't believe that Dawkins agreed to the design. The panels were to be made of a white translucent harem cloth. The large boat and cross that were a part of *American, African* could now be done by silhouette, instead of expensive constructed objects. This was such an intelligent, more visually interesting, and, perhaps most importantly, hugely economical choice.

Though I was beside myself with excitement over the design, my three concerns were that the harem cloth wouldn't be opaque enough for clear projections, the floor space that the panels occupied might be a bit of a challenge choreographically, and that I had somehow forced *American,*

African to exist in a space that was more tailored to the needs and vision of *Geminuspace*.

When I saw the set fully finished and in the space, I could not believe how incredible it actually was. It was simply stunning. It worked in all of the ways I hoped it would. The projections took to the harem cloth very well, and the separate panels made for some really interesting gaps, overlaps, and mild warping of the projections. My only regret, in terms of the set, was that I did not have any time to fully incorporate it into the choreography. There are many things that I could have done with the panels, onstage “exits,” revealing and concealing, rotating the panels in other configurations throughout the course of the piece, etc. Instead, I felt the pressures of time and worked absolutely no direct interaction of dancers and set into the choreography. This is a regret.

Costumes

My concept for the costumes changed quite a bit from start to finish. The two ideas that remained the constants were the inclusion of tutus and working in a grayscale. The tutus stuck because the reference to ballet stuck. Also, I greatly enjoy the added architectural element that tutus add in a space. The grayscale idea remained because the idea of twin and/or “copy” remained, as if we were looking at the photocopied version of a world.

My original costume drawings/designs were edgier, edgier in an “industrial punk ballet” kind of way. There were going to be lots of mixed fabrics and textures, including fishnet, velvet, and corduroy. I was going to have them include their faces in the grayscale idea by painting them in subtly varying grays and powdering their hair white. They were going to be these “apocalyptic survivor” types, hardcore and unafraid. However, as my understanding of the piece deepened, I realized that the beings I had developed through the movement did not exactly possess this “heart of steel” image, the down and dirty, iron will quality that these earlier costume drafts seem to communicate. They felt dignified and curious and distant, and not rebel and “in your face” and punkish. This kind of realization can be disconcerting only if you let it be. I definitely let it be for a time, thinking that I had lost my way and had no clue what I was making yet again. After wallowing in that for a bit, I was able to begin to do the work of getting to know what it was that I HAD made, and not the thing I had planned to make.

I was growing concerned about who exactly I was going to be working with on the costumes. I was worried that I would not be able to clearly articulate what exactly it was that I was looking for to anyone that wasn’t at least a little familiar with the workings of my brain and my aesthetic. When I found out it was going to be Tzveta Kassabova, somebody that not only I greatly admire but that I feel shares many of my aesthetic interests, I could not have been more pleased and relieved. She

was not passive in the process of finding the right solution to the costuming. Together we talked and had moments of disagreement and on occasion some stress-induced tears, but only because we both cared so deeply. Our disagreements came mostly out of my lack of a concrete design, but one that I felt was close to surfacing and that I would recognize when the time came. It was easy for me to say no and very difficult for me to say yes to ideas. Four weeks until the show, I still only clearly knew what the costumes were not. Many of the ideas that continued to be put onto the table felt extremely eccentric or bohemian. Yes, I wanted the costumes to be interesting, but I did not want them to feel too unusual or unfamiliar. I felt the movement and ideas of the piece were already unusual enough, and I was afraid that if the costumes were too quirky or, more specifically, looked as if they were trying hard to be quirky, that it would weaken rather than strengthen the piece. Once I identified this anti-quirk factor, I began to make some progress. “What is the opposite of quirky? Conventional? And what do I think of when I imagine ‘conventional dress?’ Business attire? Black tie events? What about blazers or jackets or vests?” This was pretty much exactly how the conversation ended up playing out inside of my head. I felt the combination of tutus and tailored blazers and vests, all in gray, would be very perfectly appropriate. I decided not to have the dancer’s faces painted, for fear that they would come across as clownish or, if not clownish, trying to reference the body painting and style of Butoh dance,

which I felt, other than a shared sense of the “infinite present,” were unrelated. At first, it seemed Tzveta did not totally approve, and, because I trust her judgment so greatly, I was a bit unsure. However, I went with my gut and was very pleased with the costumes. I think, though it’s possible she just feigned approval, Tzveta wound up being very pleased with the final look as well.

Sound Design

Finding and creating sound that worked with the movement was fairly difficult. It is always the last thing I begin to consider. I need for the movement to be formed relatively completely, able to stand on its own, before I even begin thinking about pairing it with sound. I find it annoying when dance is too heavily reliant or impacted by sonic accompaniment. Instead, for me, the movement needs to develop its own internal rhythm, independent of any sound that may be added later. During the rehearsal process, once the movement has enough of a self-identified rhythm, I would play a variety, and when I say variety I mean Dolly Parton, followed by Thelonious Monk, followed by Mozart, followed by The Durutti Column, followed by a recording of bird songs etc., for each run of a section. This constant trying on of music and sound is a part of my usual process, and not necessarily specific to *Geminuspace*.

I chose to work with a sound designer because I doubted that I would have enough time and/or skill to generate or find all of the

music/sound that I wanted to include. Lauren Burke is not only an amazing visual artist and musician, but a very close friend, and somebody that can, and I'm really not exaggerating, basically read my mind. I had no doubt that Burke would be the perfect person to generate and collect sound for the piece. Still, I had to do the work of creating a wish list of the kinds of sound that I thought would work with the movement. Burke not only came to many live rehearsals, but spent quite a bit of time watching recordings of the rehearsals with me and discussing sound ideas. Because, as I stated earlier, sound is something that I begin to consider more seriously toward the end of the process, there was not a huge amount of time left for her to compose all of the sound for all of sections from scratch. Instead, we decided that she would be responsible for the music for the duet and the opening overture. I gave myself the task of finding and/making sound for the remaining portions.

The overture never quite came together like either Lauren or I hoped. I wanted to include the overture for a couple of reasons. One, it felt right in the sense that because I was sort of creating a "ballet," and ballets often begin with an overture, that this was a natural inclusion. Though I think it was quite effective in this structural sense, it sort of failed to be the totally magical surround sound experience that Burke and I hoped it would be. This failed because neither Burke nor I had any experience in creating a score for alternately playing speakers, and it is apparently a bit more complicated than either of us thought. This, of course, will not stop me

from reattempting it in the future. Secondly, I thought, because *American*, *African* directly preceded *Geminuspace*, and the pieces were/are so completely different, that an overture would act as a kind of palate cleanser, a way to bring the audience into the “new space.”

I was fairly satisfied with all of the music and sound included in *Geminuspace*, other than the first five minutes of the “Apocalypse Talk” quartet. Even though it fit well with the mood, movement and idea of these first five minutes, I think the music almost did its job too well. I wanted the five minutes to feel like eternity, which one might liken to this annoying and counterproductive countdown to 2012. All of this, and in rapidly increasing quantities as we close in on the infamous December, 21, 2012 date, end of the world speak has set a strange weight upon our shoulders. This confusing notion that we may have only two years left before we face total destruction or some kind of life altering enlightenment has given those of us that perhaps buy into this crazy idea an odd mix of conflicting goals. Do we attempt to live to the fullest for these two years ... quit our jobs ... do only what makes us happy? Do we spend the time trying to figure out how to outsmart or cheat the possible end of the world by adding the false comforts of a survival plan and all of the survival goods? Do we become paranoid and look for things and people that may be responsible, down the road, for these events, and go on and destroy them before they destroy us? Do we just continue on as if nothing is going to happen? In any case, the looming possibility and the

inability to fathom a non-future is to some degree paralyzing. We are suddenly aware of the great beyond and how small, in the grand scheme of things, we are. It is a breakdown in our collective human identity. Our identity and history suggests our uncanny ability to find a way to survive on this dangerous, volatile planet despite our naturally armor-less and vulnerable exterior. Because we lose our sense of collective human identity, each of us running in a different direction, chanting “fend for yourself,” we are less capable and prepared to face what will come, even if it winds up that 2012 is not the end of the world. In any case, the music for this section was annoying and distracting and had an extreme sense of waiting, and it didn’t quite work for me. This will be something I continue to look for in the development of the next version of this piece.

What Next?

I definitely feel like the piece I showed on the 4th and 5th of March is only the first of many versions to come. I feel that there is so much more that I can investigate along the lines of the human/dancer-technology interface as elements of performance, and I fully intend to do this. For example, would it be possible (I do believe it is!) for the performer(s) to directly and individually affect the video or sound or light with their movements, to actually direct or generate these aspects via the choreographed/improvised movement? This sort of thing could be achieved with some substantial funding and collaboration with a very

computer-able person. My brother, a computer-able person, and I have been discussing the idea of performers wearing sensors that will speak to other sensors in the space, those fixed into the stage environment or those worn by fellow performers, that, either by direct contact with one another or by changing proximity to one another, would generate sound or prompt particular lights or projection. Wouldn't this be fantastic! On perhaps a more feasible scale, I am interested in taking advantage of some of the newly available projectors. For example, many new cellular phones are coming with projection capabilities. The performers would be able to easily move around the space with the projection devices, and any surface could be used for projection at any moment. These small projectors could be attached to the heads or limbs of the performers. One person could have quite a few projections radiating from their moving body at one time. I think it would be quite magical.

I am also thrilled to say that *Geminuspace* will be performed again next year! Tzveta Kassabova has invited the piece to share a concert with her work at Dance Place in January of next year. I can think of few, if any, people I would rather share a concert with than Tzveta. I am honored and so very excited, and this opportunity will give me lots of motivation to continue developing the work after I leave the University of Maryland. This performance will also be a test of the adaptability of the piece. I am still in the process of figuring out how I will modify the projection section, which will most likely have to be done without screens. Perhaps this

performance would be the perfect opportunity to begin experimenting with the miniature projectors.

In conclusion, I feel so privileged to have been given the chance to continue to develop my artistic voice at the University of Maryland. I am so lucky to have gotten to know all of the members of the UMD dance community, and I know that these friendships and connections will be life long. This concert is evidence of how much I have grown and changed as an artist and person since coming to UMD. As I enter into the next chapter of my career and ongoing education as a choreographer and dancer, I am feeling quite steady on my own two feet.